

# Rockford Historic Preservation Commission

## 2007 Annual Report

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In addition to carrying out its normal review responsibilities during the past year, Rockford's Historic Preservation Commission continued to try to expand its efforts beyond a strictly regulatory one. To that end, Commission activities during 2007 included the following:

- ♦ Review of 19 requests for Certificates of Appropriateness;
- ♦ Public hearing and review of one nomination to the National Register of Historic Places;
- ♦ Presenting our first ever workshop for area realtors;
- ♦ Opening a dialog with the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) on the economic impacts of local designation;
- ♦ Working with the River District Association on preparation of a book on downtown Rockford's architecture; and
- ♦ Revising design guidelines for placement of satellite dishes.

Here in more detail is our year in review.

### *Cases Reviewed*

Rockford's Historic Preservation Ordinance requires that a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) be issued by the Preservation Commission before any changes may be made to the exterior of locally designated properties. Of the 19 applications for Certificates submitted to the Commission in 2007, 18 were approved. The one exception – for a tree house – resulted from the Commission's attorney's determination that the Commission did not have review authority in that case. Of the 19 applications, 7 came from Haight Village, 6 from Brown's Hills/Knightsville, 1 from Garfield Avenue, and 1 from Northeast State & Main, while the remaining 4 were for individual landmarks.

**403 Elm Street** The sole remaining historic component of Winnebago County's courthouse block, the annex at 403 Elm was designated as a landmark in 2002. County officials submitted a request to replace windows on all but the fourth floor with new ones matching the original design, taking out all of the metal sections, louvers and vents, and adding back in muntins in a star design at the top that will be similar to original design.



**821 Garfield Avenue** The homeowner at this address submitted a request for two ductless mini-split air conditioners, something the Commission had never reviewed before. After considerable discussion on ways to best disguise the exterior piping, a Certificate was granted that would allow installation on the rear of the house and, if needed, the side.

**112 North Wyman Street** Another first for the Commission was review of a rooftop deck on the Richardson Building in the Northeast State & Main District. In their presentation, the owners pointed out that the deck is not directly attached to the roof, that it is a floating system. Complicating review of the application was the fact that the Commission's design guidelines do not address rooftop decks. This was one of two cases – the other being the aforementioned tree house - where the Commission was working without benefit of specific guidelines. Because the deck is on a floating system and not permanently attached to the roof, the application was approved.

## *Local Designations*

The Commission did not receive any applications for new local landmarks or historic districts in 2007.

## *Surveys*

No new areas were surveyed in 2007. However, Commission staff continued to compile information for the College/Seminary survey begun in 2006.

## *Monitoring*

The Commission reviewed the nomination of West Downtown as a district to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form was completed by Granacki Historic Consultants of Chicago under contract with private sector individuals. The primary purpose for doing the nomination was to make it easier for building owners within the new district to make use of the 20% federal income tax credit for historic preservation (while also easing the burden on IHPA staff in determining eligibility for projects). Following a public hearing on the nomination, the Commission voted unanimously to approve it.

Specific actions regarding properties already listed on the National Register include approval of Certificates of Appropriateness for the Coronado Theatre (windows), the Graham-Ginestra House (gate), and Garrison School (fence). Additionally, Commission staff continued to monitor proposals for redevelopment of properties already listed on the National Register, primarily the former National Guard Armory and the Barber-Colman Industrial Complex.

## *Activities*

**Workshop for Realtors** The Commission, with realtor member Sally Faber taking the lead, produced a half-day workshop for area realtors. The objective was to introduce them to the positives of dealing with older houses in general, and the specifics that need to be covered with homes that are in local historic districts. Speakers included two local architects – Commission member David Hagney and Jim Lev – as well as Mike Jackson, senior architect for the Illinois Historic

Preservation Agency. The Community Foundation of Northern Illinois provided space for the event. Over 40 individuals attended; virtually all provided positive feedback on the workshop. The Commission hopes to make this a regular event.

**Preservation and Economic Development** RAEDC President Janyce Fadden asked to speak to the Commission in June 2007. The thrust of her presentation was to bring preservation into the picture in addressing issues raised in Rebacca Ryan's report on attracting and retaining talent in the area, focusing on 23- to 40-year-olds. Her suggestion was to evaluate the economic impact of local designation on Rockford's historic districts. As a follow-up to this, the Commission submitted a grant application to IHPA for a grant that would allow us to do that in 2008. The basic approach will be to select comparable areas for each of the four residential historic districts, then compare such things as assessed valuation, home ownership rates and relevant Census data over time for each district and at least one comparable area. The project should be done by the end of 2008.

**Design Guidelines** As mentioned above, the Commission encountered two cases where applications were submitted for projects that were not covered by existing design guidelines. This, combined with questions raised the year before on consistency of Commission decisions over time, led to the conclusion that it is time to review and, where necessary, revise the Commission's design guidelines. While the Commission was unsuccessful in gaining approval for a grant to cover the costs of publication, it does plan to move ahead with the basic work of revising the guidelines with the goal of publishing and distributing a new document in 2009.

**Riverwalk** The Commission listened to presentations from local preservationist Gary Carlson and from the City's capital development manager Patrick Zuroske (both former HPC members) on the City's proposal to construct a Riverwalk along the Rock River. The particular issue raised was how, or if, it would go through the Indian Terrace Historic District. Final decisions have not been made on this portion of Riverwalk yet, but once they are, they will be reviewed by the Commission.

**Downtown Architecture Book** Commission staff worked extensively with the River District Association in preparing a book on Rockford's downtown architecture. This was published in mid-2007 and has met with enthusiastic responses.